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SUBJECT: CHIANG RAI RATED "SUSPECT PROVINCE"

¶1. (U) Summary: Chiang Rai's Thai Rak Thai connections make it the "second most suspect province" in the country, according to the provincial police chief, who claimed that vigilance has prevented the school fires and bombs that have plagued other parts of the country. Meanwhile, leaflets that appear to have originated in Chiang Rai and distributed in the northern region attack the Council for National Security (CNS) for serving Muslim interests. End summary

¶2. (SBU) During a meeting with the Consul General in Chiang Rai Jan. 11, Provincial Police Commander Pol. Maj. Gen. Sutep Dechruksa vigorously defended the coup, citing the corruptive effects of big money on democratic systems such as elections. Patting his back pocket he described how unnamed politicians used "capitalism" to buy elections, adding that "even the US, the best democratic system in the world, has problems; how can Thailand deal with this?"

¶3. (SBU) Sutep said many coup supporters in Bangkok view Chiang Rai, Thailand's northernmost province, and Buriram in the northeast as the top two "suspect provinces" where opposition to the CNS has the strongest hold. Chiang Rai apparently won its place in the top ranks thanks to Yongyut Tiypairat, who represented the district in parliament and served as one of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's key lieutenants. Coup supporters claim that Yongyut, as Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, was instrumental in countering PAD demonstrations by organizing forestry workers, allegedly undocumented migrant workers, to attack protest gatherings in Bangkok. Yongyut was detained for ten days following the Sept. 19 coup and his actions have been closely monitored since.

¶4. (SBU) Sutep credited police vigilance for sparing Chiang Rai from school burnings or bombs, actions that have elsewhere been seen as anti-coup protests or provocations. Calling an aide to set up a monitor, he showed visitors closed circuit TV coverage from nine spots in the city. The system cost hundreds of thousands of baht he conceded, adding that this is what is needed to stop bombings. (Although he implied that Chiang Rai was uniquely favored with the budget for this system, Chiang Mai has a similar set-up, installed as a traffic control measure about two years ago.)

¶5. (U) A TRT contact in Chiang Rai told the Consulate Jan. 16 that a series of anti-CNS leaflets have been sent to local police stations in the province claiming that the Sept. 19 coup was meant to serve Muslim interests. The leaflets and a CD, issued by the "Buddhists" and "Buddhist Monks", note that the CNS chairman and Interior Minister are Muslims and allege that the upcoming Constitution will be based on an Islamic model. According to "Manager On-Line" news service, the leaflets were first distributed Jan. 4 at a gathering in honor of revered Thai monk Khruba Boonchum at a temple in Burma opposite Thailand's

Chiang Saen/Mae Sai district. The leaflets have since been reported in Chiang Mai and Phitsanulok as well as in Chiang Rai.

¶6. (U) Bio note: Pol. Maj. Gen. Sutep Dechrugsa graduated in law from Chulalongkorn University in 1977 and earned an MPA from NIDA in the early 1980's. Since joining the Royal Thai Police in 1978 he has been posted in the Upper North, including Lampang, Tak, Lamphun, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son. In Chiang Mai he served many years as chief of the Phuping Police Station, Investigation Chief for Provincial Police Region 5 Headquarters, and Deputy Provincial Police chief. He was promoted to Maj. Gen. in late 2005, becoming police chief of Mae Hong Son before being transferred to Chiang Rai the following year. Sutep is seen as a fast-rising star in Police Region 5, thanks both to his investigative skills and his close ties with the Crown Prince. Office of Narcotic Control Board contacts speak highly of him, especially his integrity and crime-busting efficiency. Sutep's wife, Kasama Dechrugsa, teaches in the Law Faculty at Chiang Mai's Payap University.

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